



# Toolkit for Organizing a Group Volunteer Event

## (for Volunteers)

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Prepared for the **Coalition on Volunteerism** in Boise, Idaho, by a group of Boise State Service-Learning students and members of the Coalition. Please send comments and suggestions to [KaraBrascia@boisestate.edu](mailto:KaraBrascia@boisestate.edu). 6/15/14

## Preface

This guide will help launch your volunteer group, and build it into a committed group that wants to continue to volunteer together. This guide steers you to partnering with an organization already addressing the issues you care about; it is not a guide to help you create your own service project (for that, see the rich resources on the [Oregon Volunteers!](http://OregonVolunteers.org) website. This guide will help you plan a project that is successful for your group and leaves a lasting impact in the community.

**Note: Please read through the complete guide before you start your process.**

## 1. Be Real, and Get Started

Congrats! You are gearing up for a group service project. This is a great opportunity for you to make a difference in your community. We hope this is just the beginning.

Please keep in mind these tips:

- Think of this as a beginning. You can't save the world or put an end to an issue in one service project.
- Is the time right for your group? Does your group fit the project?
- Work in concert with your community partner. Remember that the first priority is to provide valuable help.
- Set reasonable goals. A small project done well has more of a positive impact than a large project that remains only half-finished (wisdom from Oregon Volunteers!)
- Be serious about commitment and follow through

## 2. Assess Group Interests

When choosing an issue or project for your group members to get involved in, ask what issues or organizations they care about. This will promote buy-in and follow-through and keep people interested.

**With your core group answer these questions:**

- What issues or organizations do individuals care about?
- How many people are in your group that are committed to the chosen issue?
- What is your group's time commitment?
- What skills does your group bring?
- What resources do you have access to that might help an organization?
- If you are a corporate volunteer group, are there policies or provisions that govern your nonprofit partnerships?

**Do you have consensus among your group?  
If yes, move on.**



### 3. Identify a Local Partner

**Identify a community organization already working on issues you care about.** Check websites such as: [www.UnitedWayTV.org](http://www.UnitedWayTV.org), [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov), and [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org).

Other places to connect with service projects include **local schools, hospitals, faith-based institutions, and parks departments**. If you are connected with a **college campus**, consider starting with organizations with which your university already has relationships. Contact the Office for Service-Learning or the Volunteer Center.

#### **Important step:**

Once you have found an organization, look at their website to learn about current volunteer projects and needs.

### 4. Contact the Organization

Ask questions to see if there is a good match between your group and the community organization. *Make this a two-way conversation. Do not simply state what you want to do and ask the organization to conform to your wishes.* Learn about the possibilities and engage in a conversation. You may wish to make an appointment to talk in person and see where your group might serve.

#### **Ask these introductory questions**

- What is your mission? What community issue does the program address and why is there a need?
- What projects need support from Volunteers? What type of volunteer(s) do you need? (skills, abilities)
- What type of commitment are you looking for from a volunteer(s)?
- Tell them about your group and what you hope to get out of the experience.

#### **Once the partner has identified a project, discuss specifics**

- What would success look like? What is the specific desired outcome?
- How much time will it take to complete the proposed project? Will your group be able to finish it in one shot? Could your group do two shifts?
- Can a wide variety of group members participate (all ages and abilities)?

#### **Talk about the role of the organization staff**

- Who are the primary and secondary points of contact?
  - Exchange contact information
- Will there be a training or orientation for participants?
  - If the answer is no you should ask for one
- What supplies or materials will you need to complete the project?
  - Who will provide these? Or will you need to provide them?
- Is it possible to schedule a walk-through before the event?
  - This is important to make sure there are no surprises.
- Is there an emergency plan?

#### **Important step:**

Investigate the root cause of the issue so you and your team can really understand the need for your involvement.

#### **Ask the organization staff to suggest ways your group can learn about the issue**

- Are there videos, links, or short articles that will help your group understand the issue?
- What type of work has already been done on the issue so far?

**Take this information back to your group. Be realistic about what your group can commit to do. Consider:**

- How many volunteers can you confidently say will show up? Can each group member make a commitment to the project and the specific time window?
- Think about number of participants, minimum age, skill level, and time availability. Will this fit the organization's needs?
- Can you provide the necessary resources?
- Can your group devote the time to learning about the issue?
- Are there any barriers that will keep you from completing the project?

Adapted from "How to Start a Volunteer Program," Inc. Magazine, authored by Issie Lapowsky, June 9, 2010

**Does your group match the needs of the project?  
If yes, move on.  
If not, reconsider taking on this project.**

## 5. Energize your Group

The success of your project will be determined by your success at energizing and retaining your volunteers. Here are some helpful hints:

1. Decide how you will communicate with your entire group for meetings and updates. Make sure you forward event information from the agency.
2. Educate your group about the issue and what impact they can have by volunteering. Make sure they know the WHY.
3. Find another point person in the group to spearhead the project. This person can be your internal champion for the project.
4. Explain the project to possible volunteers well in advance of the project date. Send out emails to group members to create excitement about the project. Set up Social Media channels or hashtags # for the event.
5. If time allows, invite representatives from your community partner to come in and discuss the project and its importance.
6. If the project is big and complex, divide the group members into teams. Have them list any skills they can bring to help with the project.
7. Consider volunteers' motivation for getting involved in projects. Try to meet group members' needs for affiliation, achievement, and influence.

*\*See appendix for some fun team building activities.*



If you need more people for your group...

- Recruit for your project where there are large numbers of people on discussion boards, university campuses, and organizational meetings.
- Recruit through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Also consider giving away branded t-shirts for your event as a recruitment tool.

**REMEMBER:**  
Cover these topics  
with new group  
members.

**Do you have enough people if a couple don't show?**

**If yes, move on.**

## 6. Promote Commitment

**First you energize your group (see previous section). Then, make sure your team shows up and follows through.**

Getting your volunteers to **take actions** before the event will increase their likelihood of showing up. Here are some ideas:

- **Get volunteers to sign up and say when they plan to be there** (ex: 9am-12pm). You may want to use an invite program like Google docs or e-vite.
- **Send a group calendar appointment.**
- **Ask volunteers to sign up to bring something specific** to contribute to the team event, such as snacks, tools, water, information, etc.
- **Encourage them to car pool.** Ask someone to coordinate carpooling. Decide on a central location to meet and caravan to the event.
- **Send reminders the week before, and the day before.** Use these messages:
  - It will be fun.
  - Tell them you look forward to seeing them. Remind them you are expecting them from start time-end time
  - Highlight certain members that have been helpful in the process
  - Remind them the organization is “counting on us”, and remind them why the service project is important
  - Tell them exactly when and where to arrive, what to bring, what to expect when they get there



- **Add a question to the email** so that they will need to respond. Put it at the top.
  - Ask them to respond to your email confirming they will be there, at what time, and what they will bring.
  - Ask for emergency contact information or any medical conditions that could be affected by the group.
  - If they have sensitive health issues that they would not like to discuss ask them to carry on their person a sealed letter explaining the condition with them in case the worst happens.

## 7. Event Timeline

Review this with the agency and group leaders so everyone is on the same page.

### **One Week Out**

Check in with volunteers (see “Energize your group” section)

Develop a risk management plan; share emergency contact information

### **Two Days Out**

Remind volunteers (see messages in “promote commitment” section)

Finalize checklist for day of event with your responsibilities as well as others’

Finalize participant list and send to the community partner. Make name tags if it is a large event.

### **Day of Event**

Arrive early to greet the group. Welcome everyone. Have sign-in form; if folks have to leave early ask them to check out with you.

Gather everyone and thank them for participating; introduce your project and partners.

Make sure the group receives an orientation to the project, including why it’s important and how it ties into the bigger picture.

Make sure all volunteers have been assigned a task.

Check in with volunteers regularly.

- Attend to social needs of volunteers. Check in with them, introduce them to other volunteers, etc.
- Monitor basic needs. Provide snacks, hydration, and breaks to rest and stretch.

Take pictures to share with your volunteers and to post on your website or other social media.

### **After the Project**

Clean up

Gather people to debrief with the agency staff.

- Discuss highlights and challenges of the day. Talk about the impact of your project.
- Discuss next steps: does the project need to be finished at a later time? Are participants interested in volunteering again?
- Invite the project partner to talk about how people can stay involved, future needs, future projects.

Ask people to share their photos electronically or via social media.



## 8. Report and Celebrate

Here are some ideas to report, celebrate, and recognize your successful project:

**Report success** in a group newsletter or website or through social media. Include numbers quantifying the work completed. List names of people involved and their roles

**Recognize participants.** Consider preparing certificates of appreciation for group members.

**Invite people to share their photographs and stories.** Create a slide show for fun.

**Prepare an extra thank you** for those group members that acted as leaders for the project.

**Reach out to the community partner**, and invite them to come and speak with group members about the impact your project had for them and the community. Thank them for working with your group.

**Start talking about another service project.** Think about what came out of the debrief session. Consider continuing the partnership with the same organization, and making it a regularly scheduled event every few months.



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# Appendix

## Volunteer Resource Guides

Oregon Volunteers Resources: <http://www.oregonvolunteers.org/resources/>

The Community Tool Box from University of Kansas: <http://ctb.dept.ku.edu/en/toolkits>

Idealist: <http://www.idealists.org/info/Volunteer>

Hands One Network: <http://www.handsonnetwork.org/volunteer-leader-guidebook>

Energize Volunteer management Resource library: <http://www.energizeinc.com/art.html>

## Team builders

### **LINE UP**

Ask your group to line up. Works best with 8-10 in a line. If you've got a bigger group, split them up and challenge each line to complete the task first. Ask the group to form a new line in order of:

- Height, from smallest to tallest.
- Birthdays, from January through to December.
- Shoe size, from smallest to largest.
- Alphabetical first names (A-Z).
- Alphabetical mothers first names.
- Alphabetical grandmother's first names!
- Anything else you think up.

### **HUMAN KNOT**

Divide your group into teams of 6-8. Each team forms a small circle. Ask them to extend their right hand across the circle and hold the left hand of the other team member opposite them. Then extend their left hand across the circle and hold the right hand of another group member. The task is to unravel the spider's web of interlocking arms without letting go of anyone's hands. Give them a three minute time limit to complete the task. Pressure!

### **BACKWARDS CLUMPS**

Divide into pairs. Ask each pair to sit on the floor with their partner, backs together, feet out in front and arms linked. Their task is to stand up together. Once everyone has done this, two pairs join together and the group of four try to repeat the task. After they succeed, add another two and try again. Keep adding people until your whole group is trying to stand together. A sight to behold!

### **HUMAN CHAIR**

Invite everyone to stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder. Each person then turns to the right to face the back of the person in front of them. Ask them to place their hands on the shoulder of the person in front. On the count of three they slowly begin to sit down on the lap of the person behind. As long as everyone is helping the person in front of him or her to sit, then everyone should be supporting the weight of everyone else. Of course, should someone slip, the game becomes 'human dominoes.' It might take a couple of attempts to complete the challenge.

# Volunteer Group Event Checklist



(Begin completion at least two weeks prior to the scheduled event)

## A. Initial Screening: Before the Event

- ☐ Volunteer group leader has completed Group Volunteer Service Agreement (IDPR form VOL 50.09)
- ☐ Staff volunteer supervisor has reviewed the site to determine feasibility
- ☐ Determine the exact nature of the project: painting, pulling weeds, building flower boxes, etc.
- ☐ Determine the number of volunteers needed
- ☐ Match the volunteer group with the project (make sure it is age and situation appropriate; evaluation of skill level conducted)
- ☐ If using court workers, determine if it is appropriate to involve other groups. If so, which groups (Eagle Scout candidates, service learning students?) Notify them.
- ☐ Verify date and time with volunteer group leader
- ☐ Tour project site with the volunteer group leader
- ☐ Identify the type of materials needed
- ☐ Decide which materials the group will provide for itself and which the park/program is to supply:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • Tools (rakes, shovels, work gloves, traffic barricades, orange reflector vests, trash bags, paint, etc.) | • Food/refreshments/napkins             |
| • Dumpsters  | • Water containers /cups                |
| • Other Special Equipment:   | • First Aid Kit                         |
|  | • Sunscreen                             |
|  | • Sharp Objects/Medical Waste Container |

☐ Cost estimate & Budget Computation (if necessary):

Food:	\$ _____
Special equipment:	\$ _____
Special services:	\$ _____
Staff overtime costs:	\$ _____
Value of donated materials:	\$ _____

- ☐ Transportation and parking arrangements if needed
- ☐ Arrangements for restroom facilities to be open or to have portable toilets available
- ☐ Arrange for security (Police patrol)/emergency medical staff if necessary

## B. Implementation

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approval for work on private property secured (if necessary)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Confirmation of event (at least 48 hours prior to the event) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secure state vehicle to transport tools   | <input type="checkbox"/> Take all necessary materials and tools                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm that group leader understands what the group is expected to do and verify that the information is passed on to volunteers | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a cellular phone/two-way radio                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give group leader your contact information  | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a camera (obtain before & after, and group photos)      |

## C. At the Site/During the Event

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Review what is expected of group members and other supervising staff members | <input type="checkbox"/> Have participants sign the designated form(s): time sheet/parental consent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Review safety procedures for all equipment                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on accomplishments and obtain feedback from volunteers             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Review the purpose and scope of event with volunteers                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide group leader with 2-way radio for on-site communication            |

## D. After the Event

- ☐ Recognition of volunteers (Send Thank-You notes as appropriate)
- ☐ Follow up with group leader to discuss outcomes
- ☐ Send (email) photos to group leader or participants
- ☐ Send Group Volunteer Time Sheet to Volunteer Services Coordinator by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month